



BE CAREFUL LEST THE LIGHT IN YOU BE DARKNESS!

(LK 11: 35)

August 2023



Reflection:

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A group was discussing the qualities of outstanding leadership. They mentioned dedication, clarity of vision, hard work, skill to gather followers, and so on. Next, they tried to identify great world leaders who displayed these qualities. They began with Jesus, Gandhi, Lincoln, Mother Teresa, and then someone mentioned Hitler. The others burst out laughing, but he persisted. Why not? Was he not a leader, though he killed hundreds of thousands?

Now let us examine the verse cited above. Jesus' reference to light that is darkness would have baffled many. We can imagine a lamp that emits bright, dim, and even red or blue light. But how can there be a lamp that gives forth dark light? On reflection, however, the Lord's message becomes clear and challenging. We realise that just as we can radiate joy and love we can also disburse discouragement and hatred. We could be bearers of radiant light or carriers of darkness.

Reflecting on the passage at hand St Augustine remarked, "It is not what one does, but the intent with which he does it, that is to be considered. For this is the light in us." Others can only see our actions and hear our words, not our intentions. Here Jesus challenges us to check the purity of our intentions.

A parallel passage in Matthew (6:23) is in the context of Jesus' teachings on religious observances to impress others (v.16) and on greed for material gain (v. 19). He concludes that our hearts will be where our valued treasures are. Theophylact of Ohrid (A.D. 1107) explains what this means. "... if you fill your mind with worries over money, you have extinguished the lamp and darkened your soul. If the mind is blinded by these worries, it is cast into darkness; then the soul becomes dark."

So how do we make sure that our heart is not dark but full of radiant light? The eagerness to keep our lamp burning is the firm foundation of our journey to holiness. The first step is to seriously desire God's ways. This should lead us to a daily examination to see if our desires and intentions are in accordance with God's will for us. But will such personal effort suffice to mend our ways?

Scripture reminds us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9) While it is difficult to understand the behaviour of others, oftentimes we find our own ways inscrutable. As St. Paul says, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rom. 7:15) No wonder, the journey of holiness calls for utter humility on our part, acknowledging in all poverty, "Lord, without you, I can do nothing."

A serious issue here is our inner wounds. We know that experiences of hurt bring in a lot of inner darkness. Most of us hide ourselves in the dark corners of inadequacy, shame and guilt. How do we bring light into the dark spaces within us? By opening our wounds to the love of God and neighbour. Ongoing sharing in deep relationships and a loving community bring healing and light. As the Apostle says, "All things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light." (Eph. 5:13)

If we take the Lord's warning about the darkness inside us seriously, we will find opportunities for cleansing everywhere. People around us, both friends and enemies, will come to our aid. Just as we look in a mirror to check for flaws on our face, a humble Christian, eager to journey from darkness to light, will accept feedback from others as a cleanser to brighten one's inner lamp. Accepting constructive criticism and correction in all humility will aid us greatly in our journey to inner purity, as will ongoing spiritual guidance with a competent elder. More than these, the sacrament of reconciliation is undoubtedly the best help to ensure that our inner light is never dimmed.

Let us earnestly pray with the Psalmist, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD..." (19:14).

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